

What about Cause and Effect?

Three social science perspectives regarding the connection between media and violence.

1. Cathartic effect: violent media reduces violence by allowing viewers to release tensions.
2. Modeling effect: violent media teaches people to behave violently.
3. Catalytic effect: views violence in terms of probabilistic causation. Violent media may act as a catalyst if other conditions are present.

The first two perspectives are psychological theories of individual behavior. The third perspective is a more sociological theory. (Sociological theory is generally probabilistic and doesn't attempt to predict individual behavior.)

Another approach, the social problems perspective, focuses not on how media make people do things, but on how media may influence people's thinking about social problems (or how people use media to understand social problems).

According to a symbolic interactionist approach, people act toward things based upon the meanings those things have for them. Thus, people's response to media will depend upon the meaning of the media to them and how this meaning relates to other meanings (their purpose for the media, identity, ideology/world view, cultural values, etc.)

Thus, one person may react to a violent media depiction as a good idea to try, a second as something to enjoy, a third as something to be protested, a fourth as something to be studied, and a fifth as something to be turned off (because it is boring, offensive, doesn't live up to other depictions, etc.).